

Modern Psychological Studies

Volume 25 | Number 1

Article 9

January 2020

Effects of Emotion on Binge-Watching

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Recommended Citation

Anozie, Victoria (2020) "Effects of Emotion on Binge-Watching," *Modern Psychological Studies*: Vol. 25 : No. 1 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://scholar.utc.edu/mps/vol25/iss1/9>

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Abstract

Previous studies have shown that binge-watching produces emotional effects. The current study examined whether there was a association between the frequency of binge-watching and negative and positive emotions. A survey was administered to 66 participants recruited from a Southern private institution. A multiple regression and correlation analysis were run on the data. Results from the analysis were significant, confirming our hypothesis that people who binge-watched more experienced negative emotions such as loss of control and dependency, and people who binge-watched less experienced more positive emotions. The implications show that binge-watching does not lead to psychosocial outcomes. Suggestions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: binge-watching, emotions, positive emotions, negative emotions, effects

The Emotional Effects of Binge-Watching

Binge-watching is defined as watching multiple episodes of a television program in rapid succession. It has become a popular phenomenon across the world today. With binge-watching on the rise, companies like Netflix are the viewing platforms that encourage binge-watching (Hallinan & Striphas, 2014). The reasons for binge-watching may vary, some are for multitasking (Kononova & Yuan, 2017), for entertainment (Flayelle, Maurage, & Billieux, 2017), and some for hedonism (Pittman & Sheehan, 2015). While there are reasons for engaging in binge-watching, the effects of binge-watching should also be considered, specifically the emotional effects.

Recent studies have shown that binge-watching is associated more with negative emotions than with positive emotions. Flayelle et al. (2019) classify enthusiasm, pleasure, gratification and satisfaction as positive emotions. While guilt, loss of control and dependency are classified as negative emotions in this study. Mehra and Gujral (2018) showed that 71.2% of participants reported feelings of guilt as they spent more hours binge-watching. However, binge-watching is still carried out regardless of the emotions that follow it. Eighty-six percent of millennials are active binge-watchers, predominately having accounts with Netflix (Irvine, 2016). In addition, a study conducted by Rapid TV News (2017) on the age distribution of binge-watchers showed that 31% of ages 18-24 are heavy binge-watchers. Panda and Pandey (2017) concluded that college students who experience negative emotional effects post binge-watching are inclined to spend more time binge-watching. This is because as people binge-watch, they feel emotions such as loss of control, dependency or guilt due to procrastination. However, at the same time they also feel positive emotions such as gratification or satisfaction, and this encourages them to binge-watch more despite the negative feelings they may be

experiencing. Relatedly, Ahmad (2018) found that 29.7% of participants felt disappointed because the episode being watched had come to an end, 19.4% reported they were happy and 7.6% stated they felt guilty afterwards. Regardless of the positive and negative emotions reported, 63.1% of participants were still eager to binge-watch after they had already binge-watched a series (Ahmad, 2018). For some people, the urge to binge-watch overpowers the negative emotions that they may be experiencing (Mehra & Gujral, 2018).

Across multiple studies, binge-watching showcases both positive and negative emotions, so it is not uncommon for people to experience enjoyment or for people to experience guilt (Granow, Reinecke, & Ziegele, 2018). Therefore, people who binge-watch may occasionally spend more time watching than they were prepared to, resulting in negative emotions. Flayelle et al. (2017) found some people feel the negative emotion of regret, and seldom feel guilt after binge-watching. This is because the feeling of regret may be due to procrastination, but the feeling of guilt may be minimal due to the gratification or satisfaction received. Alternatively, guilt can be experienced with the act of binge-watching as well. Guilt is said to be prominent amongst people who binge-watch less than frequent binge-watchers (Exelmans & Van den Bulck, 2017). This is most likely due to the fact that binge-watching is now a habit amongst people who do it often, people who often binge-watch may not feel guilty because they are already used to the gratification that comes from it. Because of this habituation of binge-watching, it is possible that frequent binge-watchers may feel more positive emotions because binge-watching provides solutions such as stress relief and escape from reality, this gratification serves as a motivation to continue watching (Panda & Pandey, 2017). However, studies have proposed that a reason people often feel guilty after binge-watching is because they limit their social interactions with others (de Feijter, Khan, & van Gisbergen, 2016 as cited in Exelmans &

Van den Bulck, 2017). In addition, studies have reported that people often chose to stay in front of laptop or televisions screens as opposed to mingling with family or friends because of binge-watching (Perks, 2014).

Positive emotions such as gratification and pleasure are associated with binge-watching as well. Some people experience pleasure because they binge-watch as a reward. These people have usually completed a task and feel the need to reward themselves for their accomplishment, so they use binge-watching as a reward. This act is often referred to as hedonism, when people self-seek pleasure as compensation (Pittman & Sheehan, 2015). Some people also binge-watch in order to immerse themselves. Immersion in reference to binge-watching may come in the form of relaxation, entertainment or by simply avoiding boredom. Flayelle et al. (2017) found that some people engage in binge-watching to immerse themselves in a storyline and as a result they convey emotions such as desire, attachment and interest.

Most of the studies conducted on binge-watching have been focused more on the motivational aspects of binge-watching and not as much on the emotional aspects. In addition, other areas of interest are the differences between individuals and their binge-watching habits (Merrill, 2018). Since binge-watching is currently on the rise, the purpose of this study was to explore the emotions associated with it. This study is building upon previous studies by focusing on whether there is an association between the frequency of binge-watching and positive and negative emotions. Specifically, it was hypothesized that there would be an association between the frequency of binge-watching and emotions within participants such that people who binge-watch frequently will yield negative emotions such as loss of control and dependency afterwards and people who binge-watch less will yield more positive emotions.

Method

Participants

Participants consisted of 66 students (58 women, 8 men, $M_{\text{age}} = 19.54$ years, age range: 18-23 years) enrolled at a private university. They were recruited through a web-oriented survey system. For classification, there were 9 freshmen, 29 sophomores, 13 juniors and 15 seniors. Race and ethnicity were not collected; however, the demographics of the sample are assumed to be representative of the university population.

Measures

Binge-Watching Engagement and Symptoms Questionnaire. Binge-watching was measured using the Binge-Watching Engagement and Symptoms Questionnaire (Flayelle et al., 2019). The 4-point Likert-type scale ranges from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 4 (*strongly disagree*). The questionnaire consists of a seven-factor model centered around binge-watching. The model used were loss of control, desire-savoring, engagement, binge-watching, positive emotions, dependency, and pleasure preservation. Example items from the questionnaire include: “I usually spend more time watching TV series than planned,” and “watching tv series is a cause for joy in my life.” This 40-item questionnaire demonstrated adequate reliability $\alpha = 0.62-0.83$. This scale demonstrates good structural and convergent validity (see Flayelle et al., 2019).

Procedure

The recruitment process involved asking students around campus if they were interested in participating in a survey about binge-watching and emotions. Other recruitment strategies included contacting participants through text messages and posts on social media websites such as Facebook. In addition, upon inquiry, a brief explanation on the study’s background was given. Students willing to participate were then sent the survey link hosted on Qualtrics. The survey

began with an informed consent page and then proceeded to the Binge-Watching Engagement and Symptoms Questionnaire. At the end of the survey, students were asked about their frequency of binge-watching and their demographics. Completion of the survey was obtained in roughly 10 minutes. Participants were thanked for their participation in the study.

Results

A bivariate linear regression was used to predict emotions from the frequency of binge-watching. The results showed that there were significant associations between the binge-watching measures and the type of emotions that occurred (see Table 1). Positive emotions ($M = 12.56$, $SD = 2.73$) showed a significant negative relationship $\beta = 1.08$, $t(64) = 5.60$, $p < .001$ with frequency of binge-watching. A significant variance ($F[1, 64] = 31.40$, $p < .001$), with binge-watching frequency accounting for 33% (R^2) of variance in positive emotions was shown (see Table 2). The results from the regression analysis support the hypothesis that people who binge-watch less show more positive emotions.

The study used two measures of negative emotions, dependency and loss of control. A significantly positive relationship was found between binge-watching and dependency ($M = 9.82$, $SD = 3.67$; $\beta = 1.25$, $t(64) = 4.52$, $p < .001$. A significant variance $F[1, 64] = 20.47$, $p < .001$) was obtained with binge-watching frequency accounting for 24% (R^2) of variance in dependency (see Table 3). This supports the hypothesis that people who binge-watch more will yield more negative emotions. The second negative measure of binge-watching used was loss of control ($M = 15.79$, $SD = 4.07$; see Table 4). Loss of control was significantly positively associated with binge-watching $\beta = 2.02$, $t(64) = 8.29$, $p < .001$. A significant variance of ($F[1, 64] = 68.82$, $p < .001$) was obtained. Binge-watching frequency accounted for 52% (R^2) of

variance in loss of control. This also supported the hypothesis that people who binge-watch more will yield more negative emotions.

Discussion

With binge-watching currently on the rise, the purpose of this study was to explore the emotional effects of binge-watching. Our goal was to investigate if there was an association between the frequency of binge-watching and emotions. It was hypothesized that there would be an association between frequency of binge-watching and negative and positive emotions such that people who frequently binge-watch would yield more negative emotions, and people who binge-watch less would yield more positive emotions.

Results obtained from the study confirmed the hypothesis. According to our results, (see Tables 1-4) participants who frequently binge-watched showed more negative emotions and participants who binge-watched less yielded more positive emotions. The results show that both emotions are associated with binge-watching, however in particular, it showed that negative emotions are strongly associated with binge-watching, as opposed to positive emotions.

Our findings go beyond the scope of previous research. Previous research on binge-watching has focused primarily on the motivations of binge-watching such as entertainment, socialization and hedonism (Pittman & Sheehan, 2015). However, our findings extended this research by examining frequency and the emotions associated with binge-watching. An important finding from our study was that binge-watching promotes negative emotions, this finding also aligned with the result of a previous studies (Mehrah & Gujral, 2018; Panda & Paney 2017). Together, these results show that emotions experienced after binge-watching are predominantly negative, yet the number of people who binge-watch is high. A recent report found 86% of millennials are reported to be active binge-watchers (Irvine, 2016). This number is

concerning given the negative effects of binge-watching. Hence future studies should focus on the effects of negative emotions on frequent binge-watchers and find ways to combat this negativity. Additionally, future studies should explore other outcomes such as health. An observational study can be conducted to test the health of frequent binge-watchers and non-frequent binge-watchers in order to see if there is an association with the negative emotions associated. It can focus on whether binge-watching is beneficial since studies have confirmed higher frequency is associated with more negative emotions and lower frequency with positive emotions.

Although this study demonstrated many strengths, it also suffered from a number of limitations. First, the study utilized two measures of negative emotions (loss of control and dependency) compared to the single measure of positive emotions. Future research should use more nuanced measures for positive emotions. Secondly, this study did not include racial and ethnic demographics, which affects the generalizability of these results. However, future research can take this lack of demographic information into account. Some races may binge-watch more than other races, this could also be a cultural or socio-economic factor. Certain households may not watch television or may not even have a television due to socio-economic status. Future research can explore if one race experiences more negative emotions than positive emotions after binge-watching as opposed to other races or research could explore if cultural and or socioeconomic factors are associated with binge-watching.

Also, the method of survey research was utilized in this study so the results obtained may be influenced by social desirability, where participants' responses may be biased. Future research should conduct research from an observational or experimental approach using other measures of

emotion. Experimenters would be able to record frequency and track emotions more accurately. By doing this social desirability may be controlled within the experiment.

In summary, the findings concluded that higher frequencies in binge-watching were associated with more negative emotions and less frequency of binge-watching would yield positive emotions. While the hypothesis may have been supported by the results obtained, certain limitations like measurements and demographics can be improved in future research in order to strengthen future results.

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Table 1

Correlation of Binge-Watching Measures

| | Frequency | Loss of control | Dependency | Positive emotions |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------------|------------|-------------------|
| Frequency | – | | | |
| Loss of control | 0.72 | – | | |
| Dependency | 0.49 | 0.56 | – | |
| Positive emotions | 0.57 | 0.52 | 0.52 | – |

Table 2

Multiple Regression Analysis of Frequency on Binge-Watching on Positive Emotions

| Predictor | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>B</i> | <i>SE_B</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>R</i> ² | <i>F</i> |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------------------|----------|-----------------------|----------|
| Positive emotions | 12.56 | 2.73 | | | | 0.33 | 31.40*** |
| Frequency | | | 1.08 | 0.19 | 5.60*** | | |

Note. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

Table 3

Multiple Regression Analysis of Frequency on Binge-Watching on Dependency

| Predictor | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>B</i> | <i>SE_B</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>R</i> ² | <i>F</i> |
|------------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------------------|----------|-----------------------|----------|
| Dependency | 9.82 | 3.67 | | | | 0.24 | 20.47*** |
| Frequency | | | 1.25 | 0.28 | 4.52*** | | |

Note. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

Table 4

Multiple Regression Analysis of Frequency on Binge-Watching on Loss of Control

| Predictor | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>B</i> | <i>SE_B</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>R</i> ² | <i>F</i> |
|-----------------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------------------|----------|-----------------------|----------|
| Loss of control | 15.79 | 4.07 | | | | 0.52 | 68.82*** |
| Frequency | | | 2.02 | 0.24 | 8.29*** | | |

Note. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.